

Conducting a Technology Audit

By William Flaherty



A technology audit can promote efficiency and learning.

The word *audit* strikes fear into the hearts of many, but effective leaders welcome any process that will help improve their organization. Since technology is a critical component in the success of any high-functioning school district, education leaders should examine it closely.

Simply put, the purpose of a technology audit is to assess the effectiveness of the technology for administrative or instructional use. An audit can assess technology in either of these areas—or both.

Rogers Public Schools in Rogers, Arkansas, recently commissioned a

technology audit that focused on integrating technology in the classroom.

“One of the objectives in our strategic plan is ‘to become a premier school district in the use of technology to support student learning, teacher instruction processes, and district business administration,’” explains Superintendent Janie Darr. “To become this premier district, we have to have a broad view of technology in Rogers, and we always find it helpful to have another set of objective eyes looking at us. We decided that a technology audit would give us valuable information to move our district forward from

good to great in the area of technology.”

Some school districts prefer an external audit while others use their own staff to evaluate the success of their program. Whichever method the district selects, it must put certain practices in place to ensure reliable results.

From Beginning to End

Every good study begins with comprehensive information gathering. The district’s technology plan, the budget for technology, the technology organization chart, and professional development are all vital pieces of information. However, they are only part of the picture. More general district documents must also be inspected. The district’s strategic plan, Website, professional learning plan, organization chart, and plans for special programs all help provide an overview of the importance of technology and how it is being implemented.

A well-constructed survey is vital to gathering crucial insight about the effectiveness of the technology program. The key to building the survey is to begin with the end in mind.

- What questions should be answered?
- What broad categories should be addressed?
- What areas of concern have been brought to light based on the document review?
- Which stakeholders should be surveyed?

Surveying parents, students, teachers, and administrators will provide a more detailed picture. Inconsistencies in perceptions among the different groups will become apparent. There

may be extensive use of technology in the classrooms that parents are unaware of. Teachers may believe they are meeting the needs of their students, but students may believe the technology could be used more often or in a way that would benefit them more.

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The final step in the information-gathering process is a formal interview of key stakeholders. These interviews should take place after all documents have been examined and evaluated and the survey has been administered and evaluated. The survey results and the information gleaned from the document review are the basis for creating insightful questions that will be asked of the same stakeholders who responded to the survey.

The responses to the interview questions might generate additional questions that will help further clarify particular issues and further refine data gathered during the first two steps of the information-gathering process.

These three steps—document review, survey, and interviews—taken collectively will yield an accurate picture of the use of technology.

The State of Technology

A report of the condition of the current use of the particular technology area is the foundation for the rest of the audit report. This section begins with a list of the evidence of success of technology-driven programs in the district. It is important to recognize and celebrate the good things that are happening. Then, the report should provide an analysis of the data.

“The analysis of the data is the most difficult section of the report for the district that is attempting to conduct an internal audit,” according to Mark Sparks, deputy superintendent of Rogers Public Schools. “We were looking to establish a baseline to determine the level of implementation of various technologies in our district. This would allow us to determine future professional development needs and implementation strategies as well as create a viable long-term technology plan.”

Often, a district does not have the in-house expertise to establish the baseline to which Sparks refers. If a district chooses to hire a consultant, it should seek someone who not only has a deep appreciation for the use of technology in education but also has a broader understanding of the instructional needs of the institution.

The recommendation section of the report sets the stage for improvement. These are the specific suggestions that will guide the district as it strives to advance its technology program.

An effective recommendation section states the current condition and suggests a way to correct or improve it. Often, these recommendations do not specifically deal with the area studied. The technology infrastructure might need to be addressed during the study of technology integration. If the infrastructure is inadequate, it will limit the use of technology. There might be some recommendations regarding professional learning. Teachers are unlikely to integrate technology in the classroom if they have not been adequately trained.

Examining all items that affect the area being studied provides true insight into needed changes. The general themes addressed in the Rogers report were technology support, data-driven decision making, technology integration, professional development, and planning and communication.

Generally, a detailed analysis of the survey results is included in the report. Although these results do not present the entire picture of the technology area being studied, they do provide concrete evidence about specific items that need to be addressed based on a representative sample of people’s perceptions. This is the section in which school officials can note and address inconsistencies in responses.

Road Map for Improvement

A good technology audit report provides the district with a general road map for improvement. The most helpful type of road map is a model that includes a rubric. The Florida Center for Instructional Technology, located in the College of Education at the University of South Florida, developed an excellent tool, the Technology Integration Matrix (<http://fcit.usf.edu/matrix/>), to evaluate the level of technology integration in a school and to provide resources to advance the use of technology in the classroom.

An audit report is just that: a report. A district will not improve unless it incorporates the findings of the report into its plans and practices. Cris Carter, chief information officer for Rogers School District, explains: “The audit has provided a valuable insight into the technology uses in our classrooms from an independent perspective, by which we can measure our district against other similar school districts across the nation. This audit revealed some weaknesses that we have already begun to address and will continue to address as time and resources become available. Our administration, our leadership cabinet, and our new technology committee are studying the results of the audit in depth and it will have a definite impact on the future direction of the district.”

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